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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ABNORMALLY WARM AND DRY WINTER EXPOSES
WEAKNESS IN KOSOVO'S PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM

¶11. (U) Summary. Many regions of Kosovo suffer from water scarcity, poor drinking water quality, and absence of waste water treatment. An unusually mild and dry winter has halved fresh water inflow into artificial lakes and reservoirs in most of Kosovo, and led to widespread water cut-offs. Several parts of rural Kosovo, including several Serb enclaves, have already run completely out of water. Agriculture, which relies on traditional irrigation methods, is also at risk in some areas. In normal years, the weakness in Kosovo's water system are masked by abundant water. End Summary.

OVERVIEW

¶12. (U) Given the dry winter and the visibly low reservoirs, there is concern throughout Kosovo about the adequacy of the water supply. Overall, UNMIK judges the current situation to be under control, but water supplies vary across the regions of Kosovo. Generally, western and southern Kosovo are better off than the east. Gjilan, Ferizaj, Pristina, and Mitrovica are all operating under water restrictions, with cut-offs for at least 8 hours a day. Gjakova, Peja, and Decan water supplies are currently adequate, although irrigation demands will likely significantly strain supplies by the end of the summer. Urban areas are much better off than rural villages that rely on wells and springs.

ANTIQUATED INFRASTRUCTURE AND INEFFECTIVE CONSERVATION MEASURES

¶13. (U) Throughout Kosovo, water systems suffer from antiquated pipes and equipment, significant losses of water due to leakage, and illegal connections. Investment is hampered by lack of revenue, and water conservation is virtually nil in the cities, evidenced by the large number of operating car washes and businesses still hosing down the sidewalk twice a day. Enforcement mechanisms for the water restrictions consist of largely ineffective ticketing systems that require court adjudication.

REGIONAL WATER COMPANIES

¶14. (U) Most of Kosovo is served by seven regional water

companies created by the Kosovo Trust Agency (KTA), the exception being small water companies in the north and small rural villages not connected to the water distribution system at all. The Pristina Regional Water Company (PRWC) covers seven municipalities and 40 percent of Kosovo's population. The two main water sources are Batllava and Badovc reservoirs, with secondary sources at Fushe Kosova and Lipjan. These reservoirs are currently well below capacity; Batllava has 18 out of 39 million cubic meters available and Badovc has 10 out of 26 million cubic meters, an estimated 9 month supply. As a result, PRWC has cut off the water in Pristina from 23:00 to 5:00 daily.

¶ 15. (U) Peja, Istok, Decan, and Klina municipalities rely on natural spring sources and have no storage capacity. Current flows from the springs, however, are higher than normal. Prizren municipality also relies on water from natural springs with no storage capacity. Current flows are normal, with 90 percent of Prizren receiving water 24 hours a day. Gjakova municipality depends on the Radoniqi reservoir, which is filled by snow melt from the Bistrica river. Lack of snowfall last year has reduced the amount of water, and restrictions are likely later in the summer. Ferizaj municipality has no current problems with water supply, but has put water restrictions into place from 20:00 to 5:00, with additional restrictions planned.

¶ 16. (U) Gjilan municipality is facing the most serious water shortages. The Prilepnicë reservoir has 19 out of 30 million cubic meters available. With only 40-50 days of water remaining, supply has been restricted to twice a week and the municipality has completed plans to truck in water.

¶ 17. (U) Water restrictions are currently in place in the

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Mitrovica region (Zvecan, Skenderaj and Vushtrri municipalities). Zvecan reportedly has water in 30 minute increments three times a day. The region gets its water supply from the Gazivoda reservoir, one of the largest reservoirs in Europe. The reservoir is full, but treatment facilities are inadequate and distribution relies on an ineffective gravity-based pumping system. High demand and leakage in the south at the lowest point in the system reduces the pressure, leading to insufficient supplies in the north. The location of the sole treatment facility in south Mitrovica leaves the unfortunate perception in the north that the south is responsible for reducing the flow of water. There is no cooperation between the Ibar Water Company in the north and the southern regional water company. Customers in the north are not billed for water; in the south, only around half of the customers pay for water. To increase north-south cooperation over water, the international community, led by UNMIK Pillar IV, plans to undertake confidence-building measures like installing water meters and forming a technical working group with experts from both sides.

RURAL KOSOVO IS HIT THE HARDEST

¶ 18. (U) Along with Gjilan, the most severe water shortages are occurring in rural Kosovo. Up to 60 percent of the population of Kosovo lives in rural areas, but only 9 percent have access to controlled and safe water from public water supplies. The wells and springs the rest of the villages depend on are already drying up. Several Serb enclaves, including Badovac/Badovc and Susica/Sushice have been without running water for weeks. The Municipal Community Office in Gracanica has implemented water restrictions, cutting off water every other day from 8:00 to 16:00 in the villages of Laplje Selo/Llapllaselle and Preoce/Preoc. KFOR plans to deliver and treat water in the most at-risk villages.

DIM PROSPECTS FOR NEAR-TERM REFORM AND INVESTMENT

¶ 19. (U) Reforms to the broken water system in Kosovo are hampered by financial sustainability questions. Like other

utilities in Kosovo, revenue collection is inefficient; total debt for the period of 1999 to 2007 in Pristina alone is 26.7 million euros. Across Kosovo, only 35 percent of supplied water is paid for. There are two competing views for improving the longer-term supply of water in Kosovo. The first, held by the majority of local experts and government officials, supports investment in new infrastructure. The alternative strategy, supported by Tim Westermoreland, the Kosovo Trust Agency's Head of Water Sector, Publicly Owned Enterprise (POE) Division, focuses initially on technical assistance to enable the utilities to reduce technical and economic losses, estimated at 54 percent. Following either strategy, improvements are unlikely to come in time to affect the water situation this summer in Kosovo.

¶10. (U) Comment: Kosovo's normally abundant rain and snow falls usually compensate for its poor infrastructure and ineffective regulatory environment. As with electricity, there is no incentive to conserve when there is no means to bill for usage. A return to normal precipitation patterns would ease the problem; a durable solution will require the commodification of water -- meaning getting people to pay for that which they have heretofore received for free. We will continue to work with KTA and the PISG to begin to address the structural challenges, and follow KFOR and others' efforts to relieve the most affected areas.

KAIDANOW